

## **FEMALE BIOGRAPHY.**

**To tell what noble acts the sex have done,  
And show what honours female worth has won,  
Inviting all a course like theirs to run**

### **JUANA INEZ DE LA CRUZ.**

**JUANA INEZ DE LA CRUZ**, was born in November. 1651, a few leagues from the city of Mexico. Her father, a Spaniard, had sought wealth by an establishment in America, where he married a lady of the country, but of Spanish extraction. Juana, the fruit of this union, displayed in early childhood a passion for letters, and an extraordinary facility in the composition of Spanish verse. At eight years of age, she was placed by her parents with an uncle, who resided in Mexico, and who caused her to receive a learned education. Her talents having attracted notice and

distinction, she was patronised by the lady of the viceroy, the Marquis de Mancera, and, at the age of seventeen, was received into his family.

A Spanish encomiast of Juana relates a curious anecdote respecting her, communicated to him, as he affirms, by the viceroy. Her patrons, filled with admiration and astonishment, by the powers and attainments of their young *protegée*, determined to prove the extent and solidity of her erudition. For this purpose they invited forty of the most eminent literary characters of the country, who assembled to examine Juana in the different branches of learning and science. Questions, arguments, and problems, were accordingly proposed to her, by the several professors, in philosophy, mathematics, history, theology, poetry, &c. to all of which she answered with equal readiness and skill, acquitting herself to the entire satisfaction of her judges. To this account it is added, that she received the praises extorted on this occasion by her acquirements, with the most perfect modesty; neither did she, at any period of her life, discover the smallest tendency to presumption or vanity, though honoured with the title of the *tenth muse*; a pious humility was her distinguishing characteristic. She lived forty-four years, twenty-seven of which she passed in the convent of St. Geronimo, (where she took the veil,) in the exercise of the most exemplary virtues.

That enthusiasm by which genius is characterised, necessarily led to devotion in circumstances like those in which Juana was placed. In the fervour of her zeal, she wrote in her blood a confession of her faith. She is said to have collected a library of four thousand volumes, in the study of which she placed her delight: nevertheless, toward the close of her life, she sacrificed this darling propensity for the purpose of applying the money which she acquired by the sale of her books, to the relief of the indigent. However heroic may be the motive of this self-denial, the rectitude of the principle is doubtful; the cultivation of the mind, with its consequent influence upon society, is a more real benefit to mankind than the partial relief of pecuniary exigences.

Juana was not less lamented at her death, than celebrated and respected during her life; her writings were collected in three quarto volumes, to which are prefixed numerous panegyrics upon the author, both in verse and prose, by the most illustrious persons of old and new Spain. It is observed by the Spanish critic, father Feyjoo, that the compositions of Juana excel in ease and elegance, rather than in energy and strength. This is, perhaps, in some degree attributable to the age in which she lived, and to the subjects of her productions, which were principally compliments addressed to her friends, or sacred dramas, to which an absurd and senseless superstition afforded the materials.

Lucretia Helena P. Cornara, of the illustrious family of Cornara, was born at Venice in 1646. She cultivated the sciences with such success, that at the age of 30 years she received the title of Doctor in Philosophy in the university of Padua. She likewise excelled in chemistry, physiology, and medicine.

Chrisame, a priestess in Thessaly, poisoned the chiefs of an army which attacked her country, by feeding them with the flesh of a bull which, by her knowledge of the nature of plants, and skill in their exhibition, she had accustomed to eat poisonous vegetables.

Maria Cunitz, a native of Silesia, understood Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and studied with success mathematics, history, music, poetry, painting, and *medicine*.

Beatrice Galindo, surnamed Latina, from her knowledge of the Latin language, founded an hospital at Madrid in 1506, which she personally attended.